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Thursday, June 14, 2007

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Doctor testifies about burns on Isaac, sister

June 13, 2007

By JACK KRESNAK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Dr. Vincent Palusci, medical director of the child protection team at Children's Hospital of Michigan, testified Wednesday morning that he found what appeared to be cigarette burn marks on the 4-year-old sister of a murdered foster child.

Palusci, testifying in the involuntary manslaughter and child abuse trial of former foster mother Charlsie Adams-Rogers in Wayne County Circuit Court, said he also saw first- and second-degree burns in photographs of the dead child, 2-year-old Isaac Lethbridge. The Free Press is not publishing his sister's name because of her age and the fact that she remains in foster care.

Adams-Rogers was charged with failing to protect both children, who were in her care together.

Earlier Wednesday, the children's former foster care worker, Karl Troy, testified that bruising he saw on Isaac in 2005 and 2006 appeared to become more severe after the boy was placed in Adams-Rogers' northwest Detroit foster home on June 29, 2006.

Troy also said that he never inspected the three bedrooms in Adams-Rogers' home to see if they were suitable for foster children. But Wednesday, examining Detroit police photographs of the bedroom where Isaac died of blunt-force injuries on Aug. 16, 2006, Troy said he would not have placed the children in that setting. He said it appeared there were several sharp objects on the floor and that a rope or belt hanging from the bunk bed could have led to the accidental strangulation of a child.

Wayne County Assistant Prosecutor Lisa Lindsey rested her case just before noon.

The first defense witness, Mae Rogers, a former foster care worker at Lula Belle Stewart Center who now investigates abuses in the mental health system, said she had known Adams-Rogers since 2002 as a good foster parent.

Defense attorney Warren Harris asked her whether Adams-Rogers' home was an unsafe environment for children. Mae Rogers said it was "a normal home" and that she never saw any marijuana smoking there. She said Adams-Rogers was always a concerned and considerate person.

However, when Lindsey showed Mae Rogers photos of the home that pictured objects that could be choking hazards, plastic bags that could suffocate a child, a cord looped on the upper bunk and a fan on the floor, Rogers said the home would not be a safe place for small children. She also said that Adams-Rogers never told her that adult males were living in the home, and she said it was not appropriate to allowing Adams-Rogers' adolescent daughter, who had emotional and other problems, to care for two young children like Isaac and his sister.

Testimony was to continue this afternoon before Judge Vera Massey Jones. Adams-Rogers may take the stand in her own defense. The case could go to the jury today or Thursday.

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Foster mother defends care of slain 2-year-old

June 14, 2007

BY JACK KRESNAK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

The former Detroit foster mother on trial for involuntary manslaughter and child abuse in the beating death of a 2-year-old in her care began testifying on her own behalf Wednesday.

Charlsie Adams-Rogers, 60, is trying to convince a Wayne County Circuit Court jury that she is not guilty of failing her legal duty to protect the boy and his 4-year-old sister.

Her attorney, Warren Harris, told Judge Vera Massey Jones that Adams-Rogers deserves a medal for her years of service to dozens of emotionally damaged foster children.

Isaac Lethbridge and his sister suffered severe bruises and burns while in Adams-Rogers' northwest Detroit home between June 29 and Aug. 16, 2006, the day Isaac was found unresponsive in an upstairs bedroom.

Vincent Palusci, medical director of the child protection team at Children's Hospital of Michigan, said the first- and second-degree burns on Isaac's chest were consistent with someone using a hot iron on the boy and occurred a few hours to two days before death. "A second-degree burn would hurt," Palusci said.

The boy's sister's burns likely were caused by a cigarette, Palusci said.

The Free Press has not published the girl's name because she remains in foster care.

Detroit Police Officer David Klein testified that, after he responded to Adams-Rogers' home about 4:15 p.m. Aug. 16, he stopped the woman's 12-year-old daughter from cleaning the room where Isaac had been found.

The children's bedroom had three beds and a mattress on the floor. According to testimony, the room was littered with dirty clothing, small objects a child might choke on and plastic bags that could pose a smothering risk. There also was a fan on the floor that a child might stick a finger into and a cord dangling from an upper bunk.

Wayne County Assistant Prosecutor Lisa Lindsey read a statement the 12-year-old girl gave police after Isaac's death, saying the boy had hit his head when she was playing with him unsupervised and tossed him onto the mattress on the floor several times from a distance of about five feet.

Mae Rogers, a former foster care worker for the Lula Belle Stewart Center agency that licensed Adams-Rogers' foster home, was the first defense witness. She said Adams-Rogers, who is no relation, provided a safe environment for children.

But, under questioning by Lindsey, Rogers agreed that the conditions police found in the home Aug. 16 represented a risk to the children's safety.

The defense's second witness, longtime foster parent Dorothy Pugh, a friend of Adams-Rogers, said the defendant's home was always "neat, clean and in order." The judge cut Pugh's testimony short, saying it was not relevant to what happened to the Lethbridge children.

Adams-Rogers began testifying about 2:30 p.m., describing how she became a licensed foster parent in 1998 when she unexpectedly became the caregiver for her niece's 10 children. In March 2002, she also took in two grandnieces, including the 12-year-old girl. Adams-Rogers adopted both girls last year.

The 12-year-old, now 13, has a history of sexual abuse and aggression toward other children. She has not been charged in Isaac's death. Adams-Rogers' parental rights to that girl and another adopted child were terminated this year.

The trial, which is expected to go to the jury today, has been slowed by frequent, acrimonious exchanges between the judge and attorneys. For several days, Jones often chastised Harris and sometimes Lindsey for such things as making faces when witnesses testified.

In a private discussion with attorneys in the judge's office about whether Adams-Rogers could talk about medical conditions of the foster children in her home, Harris protested that it was necessary for his client's defense.

When Adams-Rogers started testifying about one foster child's illness, Jones abruptly adjourned for the day, sending the jury home early and telling Adams-Rogers she could not divulge such information.

The judge began the day by telling Harris to stop frowning at her when she ruled against him.

"I can't do anything right," Harris complained.

By the end of the day, Harris was pleading, "I want to be heard," but Jones stopped him, saying he could continue to talk, but she was going into her office.

"I'm not sending anybody to jail today," Jones told Harris. "Unless they do something stupid."

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June 13, 2007

Social workers: We never inspected Isaac's home

Iveory Perkins / The Detroit News

DETROIT -- Two social workers charged with overseeing foster care placements testified today they never inspected the home where a 2-year-old boy was beaten to death last year.

The testimony came during the ongoing involuntary manslaughter trial of Charlsie Adams-Rogers, who faces 15 years in prison on allegations she failed to protect foster child Isaac Lethbridge from the beating and burns he died from Aug. 16.

Karl Troy, a social worker with Lula Belle Stewart foster care agency, testified he helped place Isaac in Adams-Rogers' care, but never saw or inspected the upstairs area of her home, where authorities claim the boy met a violent death.

Troy pointed out hazardous objects in the upstairs bedroom of the home from a photo taken the day Isaac died from massive burns on his chest and broken bones.

"You made an assessment about a safe sleeping place without even assessing the area where the kids would actually sleep," said Lisa Lindsey, an assistant prosecutor.

Another social worker from the agency, Mae Rogers, placed three other children in the home, but said she only briefly saw the whole house.

Meanwhile, a doctor specializing in child abuse testified that burns on Isaac were consistent with marks left by cigarette burns.

"They are consistent," said Vincent Palusci, specialist in child abuse pediatrics at Children's Hospital of Michigan. "The burns covered different parts of his body and appeared to be of different depth and intensity."

"In a normal child, second-degree burns would hurt, causing moderate to severe pain."

Isaac died in the crowded home of Rogers' 49 days after he and his 4-year-old sister were placed in Adams-Rogers' care. No one has been charged with killing the boy, but Adams-Rogers also faces fourth degree child abuse for allegedly harming Isaac's sister.

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Boy dies; parents arrested

Investigators suspect 2-year-old was beaten

By Norb Franz
Macomb Daily Staff Writer

A Warren couple is in police custody in connection with the death Wednesday of their 2-year-old son, who investigators believe was a victim of child abuse.

Warren officers arrested the parents early Wednesday afternoon after their son died at a Detroit hospital -- two days after the 30-year-old father brought the boy to a local hospital. Investigators declined to release the name of the boy and his parents pending further investigation.

Detectives on the case spoke to the Macomb County Prosecutor's Office on Wednesday in seeking a criminal warrant, although exact charges had not yet been determined.

The couple were expected to be held at the Warren Police Department lockup overnight and could be arraigned today in 37th District Court, Detective Sgt. James Matheney said.

"We went and arrested them," said Matheney, declining to elaborate.

The boy had been in critical condition since Monday night, when his father took him to St. John Oakland General Hospital in Madison Heights with serious head injuries. Doctors ordered the toddler transferred to St. John Hospital, Detroit, where he underwent emergency surgery Tuesday to drain fluid from his brain.

Afterward, the boy remained in critical condition on life support systems. Hospital officials notified police that it appeared he had been beaten. The toddler had bruises on his legs, buttocks and back, and a small cut on his forehead, police said.

Investigators Tuesday searched the family's home in the 2200 block of Jarvis, near Dequindre and Eight Mile Road.

The mother, who is pregnant with the couple's third child, and the father made no statements that they abused the child, detectives said.

The 27-year-old woman stated the child had vision problems and often bumped into furniture, police said.

The couple's 4-year-old daughter is in the custody of Macomb County Child

Protective Services.

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Teen charged with toddler assault abused

Updated: June 14, 2007 06:40 AM EDT

By DAN BEWLEY

KALAMAZOO -- Investigators in Kalamazoo are questioning whether a history of abuse lead a 13-year-old teen to attack a toddler.

The 13-year-old was charged with assault Wednesday in juvenile court.

24 Hour News 8's Dan Bewley spoke with a child psychologist and looked into abuse from the suspect's past.

The victim of the teen was a 15-month-old child. Detectives said the 13-year-old took the toddler after the toddler had wandered away from his home on Sheldon Street. The teen took him into a wooded area, according to investigators, and beat the young boy.

In court Wednesday, the referee ordered a psychological exam and the county prosecutor admits they will be taking a closer look into his past.

"He has facial injuries," said Sergeant Carrie Ann Thomas, of Kalamazoo Public Safety. "He does have some internal injuries that they are monitoring."

Dr. David Wagner is a child psychologist. He said a victim of child abuse is prone to become violent later in life.

"If you live with abuse, typically you're going to produce abuse," he said.

According to court records 24 Hour News 8 found in Calhoun County, the teen suspect is a past child abuse victim.

Last year the teen's father, whose name we are not using to protect the teen's identity, was convicted of child abuse. He told the court he was spanked with an extension cord and had welts on the buttocks, back, arm, leg and eye.

The teen said he was hit more than 10 times causing several welts on his body.

The "whooping," as he called it, came after he admitted to lying to his father about getting in trouble at school.

Wagner said an abused child feels as if they have no control over their life.

"So a way to regain some control is for him to exercise that control over someone who is helpless, who he can manipulate, control, and bully," Wagner said.

There is hope for the future if the teen can come to grips with his past, Wagner said.

The teen's attorney waived his right to a preliminary examination and he has been ordered to stay at the juvenile home.



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Teen charged with beating toddler

Updated: June 13, 2007 08:44 PM EDT

By JOE LaFURGEY

KALAMAZOO -- Prosecutors in Kalamazoo are trying to figure out why a 13-year-old teen would snatch a toddler off the street, take him into the woods and beat him.

More details have emerged from the case, which happened Monday night.

"I've been doing this 26 years," said Jeffrey Fink, county prosecutor. "After a lot of years, you think you've seen it all. This is one of those ... Obviously you haven't seen it all."

The 13-year-old suspect was lead into a Kalamazoo County Juvenile Courtroom Wednesday, cuffed and shackled.

The crime he's accused of, and the potential for emotional outbursts between family members of both the victim and the suspect, was the reason for the added security.

The incident happened Monday night, as the 15-month-old victim's family was moving into a Sheldon Street home.

The 15-month-old wandered away and somewhere in the neighborhood, the 13-year-old suspect, who has no known connection to the family, found the child.

The suspect, who we are not identifying because of his age, allegedly took him into a clump of woods just a few blocks away and began beating the child.

The toddler's mother, after discovering the boy missing, found the pair in the woods.

The toddler is expected to recover.

"He has facial injuries," said Carry Ann Thomas, Kalamazoo Public Safety Sergeant. "He does have some internal injuries that they are monitoring."

One investigator told 24 Hour News 8 the suspect told them he simply wanted to see what it was like.

But no one is sure why.

We asked Fink if there is anything in the suspect's past that would drive him to commit such a crime.

"There is a history, we believe should be looked at by the court at a later time," Fink said.

He would not elaborate, but a check of court records did offer some potential answers.

The suspect's father, who we are not identifying to protect his son's identity, was convicted in December of 2006 of third-degree child abuse.

The suspect said his father beat him with an extension cord, leaving welts and other marks on his arm, back, leg and face.



The teenager, 13, arraigned in court, June 13, 2007

His father was sentenced to a year and jail and ordered to take anger management sessions.

Investigators originally wanted a charge of attempted murder against the 13-year-old.

"The extent of the assault had it not been happened upon by the mom, we feel could have lead to the death of the child," Thomas said.

But the prosecutor said the assault to do great bodily harm charge better fit the crime.

Those charges are the same in Juvenile and adults court. Fink says if the teen is convicted, the difference will be at sentencing.

In Juvenile court, Judges have a wider range of sentencing and sentencing guidelines to go by. Fink says it's not possible to say what kind of time the suspect might face if he's convicted.

Neither the victim's nor the suspect's family would comment on the case.

The suspect's next court appearance is set for July 13. Until then, he'll remain in the County Juvenile Home.

Previous story from 24 Hour News 8:

[Teen accused of assaulting toddler](#)



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Plan to limit sex offenders may not be enforceable

Of The Associated Press

BEVERLY HILLS It seemed like a good idea at first: Enact a local ordinance keeping convicted sex offenders away from children and public spaces in this quiet Detroit suburb.

But criticisms from residents and fellow council members that the proposal is Draconian and would be unenforceable appear to be dimming its prospects for passage ahead of a possible vote June 19.

The proposal would prohibit convicted sex offenders from living within 1,000 feet of playgrounds, day care centers, public parks and city buildings. It would also make it a misdemeanor for offenders to loiter within 300 feet of a public park.

Todd Stearn, an attorney and the Village Council president, said a resident suggested the community enact its own ordinance to shore up existing state laws. Stearn then asked the village's attorney to draft a proposal to bring before the council.

"Frankly, I didn't expect all the hoo-ha," Stearn said. "I thought this was just a simple thing that would fly right through."

Michigan's Public Sex Offender Registry lists six people among the 10,100 residents of Beverly Hills, a four-square-mile suburb about 12 miles north of Detroit, although the specifics of each individual's crimes are not included.

"It's not as if it's a major problem," Stearn acknowledged. "It's just that I wanted some legislation in place to help just in case."

Michigan already has a number of tough laws dealing with sex offenders, including a ban on living within 1,000 feet of schools and a requirement that some offenders be electronically tracked with global positioning system technology.

But some residents say the proposed local ordinance would further complicate an unruly web of laws.

Gail Benson, who has defended accused sex offenders as an attorney, e-mailed village officials recently and likened the proposal to "political grandstanding."

She said Michigan's sex offender registry makes no distinction between young people prosecuted for having consensual sex with a minor and

legitimate child predators.

That's caused severe disruptions in the lives of offenders of all levels, she said.

"It's pretty Draconian to accomplish what people want to accomplish, which is to keep the five, 10, 100 real crazies from public places," Benson said.

And even that may be an impossible task, she said.

Cooley Law School Professor Anthony Flores, who formerly headed the child sex abuse unit of the Ingham County Prosecutor's Office, said the Beverly Hills proposal mirrors a larger trend where communities effectively zone out offenders, forcing many from their homes. Florida's Miami-Dade County has laws so strict it has forced offenders to live under waterfront causeway bridges. In Iowa, offenders driven from their homes have flocked to motels or have fled the state altogether. There are more than 21,000 sex offenders on Michigan's public registry, while a database for law enforcement officials lists more than 41,000 offenders, said Shanon Akans, a state police spokeswoman. The nonpublic registry includes juveniles, offenders who have moved out of state and offenders at large.

Flores said Michigan's criminal sexual conduct laws are sufficiently broad to prosecute even groping incidents. Those convicted of rape make up a minority on the state's registry, he said.

Stearn said he's received negative responses from residents and fellow council members.

Renzo Spallasso, the village manager, likened the proposal to a solution in search of a problem and said it would be nearly impossible to enforce.

But some parents playing with their children Wednesday at a local park said they'd welcome the additional protections.

"It's only as enforceable as the sex offender list," said Jeff Dougherty, a father of three. "If people can get by that - and they can - I'm not sure what the effect is. But it seems that if the village enforces this ordinance, it might make people think twice about coming here."

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Article published Jun 14, 2007

Trial scheduled in Salem arson case

By James Mitchell
EDITOR

Nearly a year after flames all but destroyed the Salem Township home she lived in, Lori Gayle Knop is scheduled for a September trial charged with the attempted murder of her 6-year-old son.

Knop faces felony charges of attempted murder, arson, and fourth-degree child abuse (reduced from the original second-degree child abuse charge filed against her).

The charges stem from an October 2006 fire that engulfed her rented home off Six Mile Road, a blaze prosecutors in Washtenaw County contend that Knop started with the intention of killing her son.

A final pre-trial date of Aug. 30 was set last week during a conference in Washtenaw County Circuit Court, and a jury trial is scheduled to begin Sept. 10.

Deputy Chief Prosecuting Attorney Steve Hiller said that the charges have been through several delays since Knop was arraigned following the Oct. 20 fire; several months passed while Knop was evaluated by forensic psychiatrists to determine her competency and ability to assist in her own defense.

"At some point, the judge set the trial date so the case moves forward," Hiller said of last week's announcement.

Before the final pre-trial is held in August, defense attorney Thomas Cranmer asked last week that an independent evaluation be conducted.

Cranmer, appearing pro bono from his Troy-based firm Miller Canfield, said that Knop's defense needs to be as thorough as possible, given the severity of the charges.

"This is a situation where, I think, caution is dictated," Cranmer said. Whether or not an attempt will be made to have the charges reduced or reach a plea agreement depends upon the evaluation, Cranmer said.

"After that, we'll be in a better position to analyze the case," said Cranmer. "It's a little premature at this point."

Hiller said that the prosecutor's office did not object to a county-financed, independent evaluation.

"If she is contemplating running an insanity defense, by statute she has a right to an independent evaluation," Hiller said. "We'll take a look at it when it comes in, but as of now we're preparing for a trial."

House Democrats' legislation addresses human trafficking

June 13, 2007

By CHRIS CHRISTOFF

Free Press Lansing bureau

LANSING -- Modern-day slave traffickers are the target of legislation by House Democrats who say local and state authorities have too little power to prosecute those who force thousands of men, women and children into servitude.

A package of bills would add human trafficking to Michigan's racketeering statute, which would allow authorities to pursue organized slave traders and those who bankroll them.

The legislation also would allow seizure of assets of those convicted, and force them to pay their victims in lost wages and other compensation.

State Rep. Marc Corriveau, D-Northville, is among the co-sponsors of the bills, and said they're necessary to put teeth into existing laws and break up human trafficking rings.

"This is long overdue," Corriveau said.

The lawmakers cited federal reports that estimate between 600,000 and 800,000 people -- half of them children -- are trafficked across international borders each year to serve as prostitutes and servants.

Those numbers do not include those who lured or abducted and pressed into servitude within U.S. borders, the lawmakers said.

The sponsors cited the recent case of a Canton Township couple convicted of conspiring to enslave a young girl they brought back to the U.S. from Cameroon. They first were convicted under state law for child abuse and criminal sexual conduct. Afterward, they were convicted under federal trafficking laws.

The House Democrats said their bills would allow prosecution for trafficking under state law.

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June 14, 2007

Warren

Parents held in tot's death

Macomb prosecutor says charges expected today for mom and dad of 2-year-old who died after head injury.

Edward L. Cardenas and George Hunter / The Detroit News

WARREN -- The parents of a 2-year-old boy who died Wednesday after doctors said he suffered a closed-head injury are expected to be charged today in connection with his death.

Warren Police on Wednesday arrested the parents, whose names were not released.

"They're locked up (in the Warren Police Department), and they'll be here until they're arraigned," said Warren Police Chief Jere Green.

About 11:15 Monday night, police were called by St. John Oakland Hospital employees, who reported possible child abuse. Doctors told police the child was suffering from a closed-head injury.

Doctors also told police the child's father, a 30-year-old who lives on Jarvis Street, brought him to the hospital. After the toddler was examined, he was transported to St. John's Hospital in Detroit.

Doctors performed surgery to remove fluid in the brain. The boy remained in critical condition until he died Wednesday.

Investigators said the boy had a number of injuries, including some that appeared to be from prior incidents.

On Tuesday, the father and mother -- who is pregnant -- lost custody of their 4-year-old child.

"We will be bringing charges," said William Cataldo, chief of homicide for the Macomb County Prosecutor's Office. "We are waiting for (police) reports to be presented."

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Wayne briefs

Detroit: No decision on charging Rogers

No decision is expected this week on whether the Detroit Lions' Shaun Rogers will face criminal charges following accusations he groped a stripper at a Detroit club last week, Wayne County Prosecutor Kym Worthy announced Wednesday. She had hoped to make a decision sooner but said, "It is important to take the time needed to make a fair assessment of the facts." A 20-year-old dancer at the Loose Ends Players Den on Joy Road told police the 28-year-old player entered a dressing room Friday with a gun in his waistband and groped her.

Taylor: Truck-motorbike crash kills rider

A 63-year-old Taylor man died Wednesday when his motorcycle collided with a garbage truck in a construction zone at what is regarded as one of the five most dangerous intersections in the city, police said. The man on a Harley-Davidson was riding west on Ecorse and collided with the truck as it turned north onto Monroe, Sgt. John Blair said. The traffic light was yellow for both drivers, said police, who so far don't suspect the truck driver of negligence.

Canton Twp.: Boyfriend charged in attack

A 38-year-old Canton Township man was arraigned Wednesday in 35th District Court on charges of stabbing and raping his girlfriend at the Heathmoore Apartments near Ford and Interstate 275. Charles Blue Jr. faces life in prison on allegations he lured the 46-year-old West Bloomfield woman to his apartments on promises he quit drugs, but stabbed her in the neck, arm and eye before raping her Monday, police said. A preliminary

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examination is set for June 22. He remains jailed on a \$100,000 cash bond.

Hamtramck: Human services office stays

The Department of Human Services office will remain open for the next year after state officials struck a deal with the landlord Tuesday. The office was set to close as a part of budget cuts, but residents and officials lobbied Lansing to keep open the office that offered specialized services for immigrants.

Dearborn Hts.: Wandering tot in custody

A 3-year-old boy who was found wandering alone Wednesday along Beech Daly near Van Born remained at a child protective services office in Taylor. Police said is unclear whether charges will be filed against the unidentified mother who appeared at the police station to retrieve the child and discussed with investigators how he ended up walking around the busy street unsupervised.

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Foster and adoptive parents fill huge need

Wednesday, June 6, 2007 1:00 PM EDT

Thursday, May 10, 2007

In an ideal world, every child would have a mother and father that loved them and provided for their every need. Unfortunately, it isn't a perfect world.

In Michigan alone there are more than 4,000 children waiting for a family, or for their adoption to be finalized.

When parental rights are terminated, it is the loving and giving people who open their homes through foster care, who provide a place during transition.

Governor Jennifer M. Granholm has declared May as Foster Care Month in Michigan to highlight the vital role that foster families play in caring for the state's 18,500 foster children.

Foster Care Month provides an opportunity to make Michigan residents more aware of the need for caring, dedicated foster parents and the needs of children in foster care. Children usually enter foster care because of neglect or abuse in their homes. Foster care families provide safe, stable and supportive homes for these children and youths until they can be returned to their parents or are adopted into permanent homes.

Finding enough homes to meet the needs here in Michigan for foster families is critical.

Though the goal is for children to remain, or be returned to their parents, safety concerns often mean separation is necessary. When children must be removed, those in the Department of Human Services (DHS) are interested in the child's welfare work toward keeping children with siblings and relatives and in their communities.

Babies are the easier to love, but older children and minorities are often the hardest to place.

Forty of these children are featured in a heart-warming photographic exhibit called the Michigan Heart Gallery. The Michigan Heart Gallery, a collaborative effort between the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange, the Adoptive Family Support Network and the Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS), seeks to bring our community closer to the faces and voices of children waiting for a "forever family."

This exhibit will be touring Michigan and free copies are available of a promotional DVD, featuring photographs from the exhibit, video of children who are waiting to be adopted and information about the adoption process for families who are ready to begin the process.

The photographs in The Heart Gallery were taken by more than 40 professional photographers who donated their time, talent and resources to take portraits that help capture the spirit of children in the foster care system. The Heart Gallery allows these children to be seen in an artistic, poignant and tasteful photographic exhibit. The kids thoroughly enjoyed their photo shoot experience. Some children were able to help select which portrait to feature in The Heart Gallery, while others came up with their own poses and some were given lessons in photography during the photo shoot, allowing them to become budding photographers themselves.

For more information about the Michigan Heart Gallery and how you can get involved, please call (800) 589-6273 or visit The Michigan Heart Gallery Web site at www.miheart.org



Foote ends its HMObusiness

Thursday, June 14, 2007

By Christina Hildreth

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In a cost-savings move, Foote Health System announced Wednesday it will close its health-maintenance organization, Physicians Health Plan of South Michigan, and encourage customers to transfer their business to a Grand Rapids insurer.

Because some contracts aren't up for renewal until next year and it takes several months to receive bills from providers, it will take as long as two years to completely close PHP. However, some contracts will begin to expire in the fall, officials said.

PHP of South Michigan sells insurance in Jackson, Washtenaw, Livingston, southern Ingham, northern Lenawee and eastern Calhoun counties. It covers 25,000 people and sells health coverage to more than 750 companies, mostly small businesses but also Consumers Energy and the state of Michigan.

The decision will not affect employees or policyholders of Physicians Health Plan of Mid-Michigan, which is owned by Sparrow Health System of Lansing.

Health insurance for Foote's 3,000 employees will switch to Priority Health of Grand Rapids, which insures 550,000 people and does business statewide.

Priority is able to spread the cost of administration and catastrophic claims across more payers than PHP, lowering the relative cost per policyholder.

"Health plans now to be competitive are requiring a size and scope that we don't have and we aren't going to be able to get," said Foote CEO Georgia Fojtasek.

Priority Health is paying Foote an undisclosed fee to turn over its customer list and encourage customers to shift their business.

Closing PHP will eliminate more than 30 jobs with Foote. PHP interim CEO Wynn Hazen said he doesn't expect to see positions cut until at least September.

However, Priority plans to open an office in Jackson and is interviewing PHP employees, said company CEO Kim Horn. She declined to say how many employees will work in her company's Jackson office.

Several other PHP employees have already found positions at Foote.

"Our goal is to work with (Priority) to absolutely minimize the impact on staff," Fojtasek said. "I think it would be safe to say that there would be a potential of 10 to 12 staff who could be (out of work), but we are trying to get that to be a very low number to none."

Foote, which has added more than 415 jobs in the past three years, anticipates it will continue to be a bright spot in the struggling Jackson economy, Fojtasek said.

Jennifer Trudeau, president of International Union of Operating Engineers Local 547, which represents 400 Foote employees, isn't concerned about an adverse impact on coverage. Foote and the union recently reached a three-year agreement on health coverage.

"I trust that Foote will stick with what they agreed to at the negotiating table," she said.

In the next month, Foote will work with Priority to try to preserve the provider networks that were available under PHP. All Foote services will be covered under Priority.

As part of the transition deal, Foote gains a seat on Priority's board and will have some say on its governance and practice committees. That's important to Fojtasek.

"We decided we would only look at provider-owned plans like ours," she said. "We believe that that connection with the health system really results in a community focus, in a best-practice focus and in being able to build a system of care so that the goal is that care will be better and more cost-effective."

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Article published Jun 13, 2007

STATE: Teens held in carjacking of seniors

By Amber Hunt and Jack Kresnak

GANNETT NEWS SERVICE

For a few minutes, the teenage driver of the stolen Ford Mustang convertible laughed and blared the music.

But the jovial mood soon ended: The 16-year-old and his buddy, 14 -- both of Detroit -- were arrested in connection with the beating and carjacking of three elderly women who were parking the car to go to a doctor's appointment at Mack and Fisher in Grosse Pointe.

The teens are being held in the Wayne County Juvenile Detention Facility for five days. Prosecutors have until then to decide whether to charge them as adults.

Officials said the three women -- two sisters in their 60s and their 87-year-old aunt, all of Ontario -- didn't give the car up willingly when it was stolen at 3:45 p.m. Monday.

One of the women was hit as she stood in front of the car. Her sister grabbed hold of a door handle and was briefly dragged along Mack.

The two were treated at hospitals. Both are expected to recover. Their aunt wasn't hurt.

The suspects appeared Tuesday before Wayne County Juvenile Court Referee Jennifer Pilette, who said they would be detained without bond. They could face charges of carjacking, assault with intent to do great bodily harm and fleeing and eluding.

As the teens walked into the courtroom, the 16-year-old extended a hand to Grosse Pointe Police Detective Ron Wieczorek, who, after a moment's hesitation, shook hands.

Police said both boys admitted the carjacking. The older teen said he took the keys from "the old lady."

"I knew it was wrong," the 16-year-old, a student at Finney High School in Detroit, reportedly told police.

The 14-year-old, whose school wasn't known, told police that after his friend ran down one of the women, he turned the radio up and danced in his seat as he drove.

"He seemed happy about it," he reportedly said.

The younger teen said the two drove 90 m.p.h. as they fled police.

The tale is reminiscent of last month's beating and carjacking of 91-year-old Detroiters Leonard Sims, who survived after being punched 21 times as his car was stolen.

Thanks to a Detroiters tip, the teens in Monday's carjacking and attack were tracked down by members of a Wayne County auto theft task force and officers from police departments in Grosse Pointe, Grosse Pointe Farms, Grosse Pointe Park, Harper Woods and Detroit.

Authorities found the teens hiding inside a house on Beniteau on Detroit's east side. The car was recovered.

"Community help is extremely important," Wayne County Sheriff Warren Evans said Tuesday.